

MATKIN CEMETERY, 37 - 3

Summary Report



MATKIN CEMETERY (37-3), Redstone Arsenal, Madison Co. AL, December 16, 2002.

The Matkin family name is considered to be interchangeable with the early Madkin families in north Alabama. For example, Thomas Crow Matkin was recorded as buying a tract of government land in Morgan County in 1835. However, in 1833 Thomas Crow Madkin was also recorded as buying a tract of government land in Morgan County. The role of phonetics in the spelling of names (of people who were generally illiterate and couldn't offer definitive spellings of their own names) by recording clerks is self evident.

This no doubt is one of the primary reasons for the early interchangeability of the two surnames Madkin and Matkin.

Madkin Mountain on the arsenal (Sheet 5 of the 1986 Redstone Arsenal General Site Map series, with its peak in Sections 20 and 28 of Township 4 South, Range 1 West) derives its name from these early landowners of the area. Not only were there pioneer Madkin / Matkin families in the area, but after the slaves were freed, some of them chose to keep that as their new surname. The result is seen in the census records of the 1800s. While there were no Madkin / Matkin names found in the 1809 Madison County census, nor in the federal censuses of 1830 or 1840 in Madison County, the 1850 census shows 3 “Matkins” families in the county. The 1860 federal census showed only 1 “Matkins” in the county, but the 1870 federal census (after slaves were freed and took surnames) has 56 Soundex “hits” on the Ancestry.com internet census subscription service when searched for Matkin(s) / Madkin(s) in Madison County. Of these Soundex hits, 40 are truly for Matkin(s) / Madkin(s), as opposed to other surnames that share the same Soundex code. Of the 40 Matkin(s) / Madkin(s) hits in the 1870 census of Madison County, the great majority are listed as Colored or Mulatto, living in the Township 4 South Range 1 West area, which is almost entirely on land that is now part of the arsenal. Furthermore, the Matkin Cemetery is within about one-half mile of the location of the Madkin Cemetery, which is thought to be the burial place (on the old plantation) of some of the former slaves of the Matkin family.

The intrigue of the Matkin Cemetery (37-3) is centered around Mary Patton Matkin and the uninscribed obelisk next to hers.



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Mary Patton Matkin is the name inscribed on the center marker. The uninscribed obelisk is to the left. To the right is the marker for Mary's mother, Margaret (McDonnell) Matkin, wife of William Matkin and daughter of Archibald & Elisabeth McDonnell. Archibald McDonnell was also a prominent early landowner of the area. To the far right (out of view) is another (fourth) obelisk base, but the obelisk itself has disappeared from the cemetery, and whom it was to commemorate is unknown.

In fact, the markers that are in the cemetery today are not thought to be the originals. They appear to be made of concrete in recent times. In Dorothy Scott Johnson's book THE CEMETERIES OF MADISON COUNTY, ALABAMA, Vol. I (1971), on page 281 the marker for Margaret Matkin is described in a note as follows: "The marker on Margaret Matkin's grave was most unusual. It was in the form of a large cement box with the inscription on the top side, face up." There is no surface evidence of such a box there today, but about 3 inches under the soil on the east side of Margaret's tombstone is a large slab of concrete or stone that could well have been part of the box that Mrs. Johnson described in 1971.

Mary's obelisk has been broken and patched. The patch was performed by the Sparkman Marble & Granite Works of Huntsville, according to Monty Sparkman, owner and operator of the business.



Matkin Cemetery (37-3); Redstone Arsenal; Madison County, AL; October 23, 2004

The inscription on Mary's tombstone can be interpreted two common ways. One way is that her name was Mary Patton Matkin. The other is that her name was Mary Matkin until she got married and became Mary Patton. The practice in this cemetery, by comparing to the wording on the adjacent marker for Margaret Matkin, would indicate the latter – Mary (Matkin) Patton, as a married name. However, since the birth and death dates clearly show that Mary died at the age of 4, there obviously would have been no marriage. The use of "Patton" as her middle name is not in keeping with the custom of using the mother's maiden name, since her mother was a McDonnell. However, there were a number of prominent Patton families living in the area during the period, so that suggests that some other connection existed – or that Mary's parents were highly impressed by the Patton families.

The marriage of William Matkin to Margaret "McDonall" (McDonnell) was recorded in Madison County Marriage Record Book 4, page 184. The date of the license and the marriage is given as March 8, 1834, when Margaret would have been age 34 and William age 23 or 24 (if his age in the various census records is correct). Since her death occurred on March 8 also, she died on her 15th wedding anniversary.

The Matkin family history relative to the arsenal area is given somewhat in an article that appeared in the Huntsville Times on July 7, 1997 (see scanned image below). However, the family data posted to the Ancestry Family Tree files at Ancestry.com on the internet show some confusion and conflicts among the researchers. The census records indicate that the early Matkin / Madkin families of the north Alabama area were headed by Thomas Crow and Durham Madkins, who both patented government lands in Morgan County in the 1830s and appeared in the 1830 federal census in that county. The 1840 census showed a T. W. and a D. Madkins in Morgan County. It is likely that T. W. should have been T. C. By the time of the 1850 census, only Durham Madkins appeared of these families in Morgan County. However, Madison County had both William Matkins and E. W. Matkins, living in adjacent households. William's birthplace was given in the 1850 census as South Carolina, as was Durham's in Morgan County. Durham was listed as age 43 in 1850, while William was given as age 39 and E. W. as 34, born in Alabama. Since all of these men are known to be of the same family from lengthy Madison County Chancery Court records, then their arrival in Alabama was between 1812 and 1816, according to the birthplaces and ages of William (39, SC) and E. W. Matkins (34, AL). It was William

who married Margaret McDonnell, daughter of Archibald McDonnell, and established the cemetery in what is now Area 37 of the arsenal.

E. W. Matkins was Ezekiel W. Matkins, born about 1816. He was a brother of William, who became Administrator of Ezekiel's will in the late 1860s. Ezekiel had no children living when he died, but he was survived by a widow, Malinda. The brothers of Ezekiel Matkin, along with several sisters, nieces, and nephews, are listed in the records of the Madison County Chancery Court, Record Book AA. Page 198 of that record is shown below, being one of many pages recorded about the dispute of land bought by the Matkins from Nancy Graham Beadle Jordan, the young widow of elderly Abraham Beadle. Nancy had married Abraham in 1849 when he was age 72 and she was 17. He died a few years later (in 1858), and in 1860 Nancy married John Jordan (b. 1830), possibly a grandson of Bartholomew Jordan, patriarch of a family that also owned extensive lands that became part of the arsenal.

Abraham Beadle had specified in his will that his lands were left to his widow Nancy for her use during her lifetime, and then to revert to his nephews, since he had no living children. However, soon after her marriage to John Jordan, Nancy sold portions of the Beadle land to the Matkin brothers, and a lawsuit ensued in the late 1860s. As a result of the lawsuit, the Chancery Court ruled under the terms of the will in favor of the Beadle family complaintants, and the Matkins lost the lands that they had purchased from Nancy. While it no doubt was a traumatic experience for the Matkins, the lawsuit at least caused details of the extensive Matkin relationships to be documented for posterity in the public records – including places of residence for the various Matkin family members during the period.

MAD. Co. AL
Marr. BK 4
P. 134

THE STATE OF ALABAMA,
MADISON COUNTY.

To any of the Judges of said State, any Justice, of the Peace of said County, or other person
legally authorised

These are to authorise you or either of you, to solemnize the rites of matrimony between
William Matthews and *Margaret McDonald*
of said County, agreeably to the statute in such case made and provided. Given at the office
of the Clerk of the County Court of said county, this 8 day of *March* 1834

Richd B. Quam CLERK C. C.

Solemnized on the

8 day of *March* 1834
P. B. Robinson
Min. G.



Matkin Cemetery (37-3); Redstone Arsenal; Madison County, AL; October 23, 2004

Huntsville Times (newspaper), July 7, 1997

Worker feels special meaning passing family homeplace

By REBECCA SALLEE
For The Times

July 7,
1997

As you pass the intersection of Martin and Patton roads on Redstone Arsenal, you're probably thinking about getting to work on time, not what took place here more than 100 years ago.

But the intersection means something else to Brian Matkin, chief of the concepts and analysis division of the AMC Smart Weapons Management Office.

It's the approximate location of his grandfather's birthplace.

William "W.J." Matkin Jr., Brian's 81-year-old father who worked at the arsenal as an instrument maker for 21 years before retiring to his Morgan County home, said his father, W.J. Matkin Sr., once pointed out the spot to him.

"He was born in a log cabin in 1889," said W.J. Matkin Jr., who thinks his ancestors first came to the area around 1819, when it was still part of the Mississippi Territory.

Study a map of the topography of Redstone Arsenal, and "you will see hundreds and hundreds of streams coming into the Tennessee River from both sides," said W.J. Matkin Jr. "You can anticipate that the people that came into those areas probably came in boats, what they called long boats."

His father told him the cabin was near

"the best well on the water," W.J. Matkin Jr. said. "He remembered it from the time he was a child."

W.J. Matkin Jr. isn't sure how much land his kinfolk had. "I think land grants were something in the neighborhood of 940 acres," he said.

Although many of his ancestors moved to Texas, some of the Matkins family stayed in the area, and a mountain on post is named for the family — although it's spelled improperly. "Madkin" Mountain is visible from Patton Road.

"They were asking people in the area what the name of the mountain was, and that's the way they pronounced it," said W.J. Matkin Jr., who thinks the mountain was officially named in the 1930s.

The family also recently learned about a Matkin cemetery at Redstone Arsenal. Ironically, they discovered it through members of Brian Matkin's National Guard unit — Battery C, 1-203rd Air Defense Artillery.

When he heard about the cemetery near the Air Defense Training facility, W.J. Matkin Jr. visited the site with son Brian and daughter-in-law Brenda Matkin, who also works on post as an electrical engineer for MICOM.

Among several graves at the cemetery, they found the tombstone of W.J. Matkin Jr.'s great-great grandfather, William Blunt Matkin, who died in 1849.

Visiting the cemetery wasn't emotional, said W.J. Matkin Jr., "it was just interesting. Everybody's got great-great-grandparents."

But Brian Matkin can't help but think about his family history as he passes Sparkman Center, which sits on land his ancestors once farmed.

"The family and the people of this area gave up property in a depressed period of time in order to bring in jobs," he said. "I think they'd be proud of it."



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The Matkin Cemetery on Redstone Arsenal may well be filled with graves of various members of the family and even some of the slaves of the early period. With no markers to tell the story, only conjecture can be used. The missing obelisk may never have been purchased and installed on the base near the middle of the cemetery. The obelisk that has no inscription was probably intended for William Matkin himself or some other close family member, but the newspaper article only indicates that William Blunt Matkin, who died in 1849 (same year as Margaret, wife of a William Matkin who appeared in the census as late as 1870) is buried there, in addition to those for whom markers are found now.

In any event, the Matkin families left a legacy in the area, both through their own direct descendants and through the families of the freed slaves that were brought to work their lands. In the Huntsville area telephone directory for the year 2002, there are 4 Matkin entries plus 1 Matkin, 1 Madkin, 1 Madkins, and 1 Madkims. By marriage, the family was interwoven into the

prominent McDonnell family of arsenal land connections, dating back to July 6, 1809, when Archibald McDonald (McDonnell) patented government land along Indian Creek, 160 acres in Section 15 of Township 4, Range 1 West. Of course, that was not all of the McDonnell lands, as Archibald acquired more government land on August 29, 1809, and he continued to buy and sell lands through private transactions recorded in the county deeds at the courthouse. The nearby location of the McDonnell Cemetery (thought to be a slave cemetery, no markers) on the arsenal, less than half a mile to the east of the Matkin Cemetery, indicates that the families lived in close proximity. Their destinies mutually interlinked, they have another namesake landmark on the arsenal, beyond the name of a mountain, as McDonald (McDonnell) Creek flows through their old lands today.

Prepared by John P. Rankin, October 22, 2004, revised December 23, 2004